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Karma and Female Birth

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Karma and Female Birth[1]

Bhikkhu Anālayo[2]

Abstract

With the present paper I examine the notion that birth as a woman is the result of bad karma based on selected canonical and post-canonical Buddhist texts.

Introduction

In her study of the position of women in Thai Buddhism, Kabilsingh (31) remarks,"it is frequently said, for example, that 'women were born from their bad karma' . . . many women are convinced that they carry a heavy load of negative karma due to the simple fact of their gender." As a result of this, according to Kabilsingh (16) "Thai women seem to accept their suppression without complaint. Exploitation, whether physical, legal, or

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cultural, has been justified on the basis of karma, and has therefore been accepted as the expression of [a] religious principle."[3]

Testimony to this notion can be found in a 14th-century inscription from Sukhotai, where the queen mother formulates an aspiration that the merit of her founding a monastery may conduce to her rebirth as a male.[4] The wording of her aspiration conveys the impression that her urge to become a man is so strong that she imagines having become one already, and is now looking back at a previous existence as a female.[5]

A rationale for this type of aspiration finds expression in a passage in the commentary on the *Sutta-nipāta*, the *Paramatthajotikā*, which reports an aspiration made by a woman to be reborn as a man. In her aspiration, she notes how disgusting it is to be a woman—even the daughter of a wheel-turning monarch will be under the control of others—and therefore aspires to become a male.[6] In other words, her aspiration to become a male is motivated by the wish to escape the restraints she experiences in a patriarchal society.

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[3] Cheng (57) reports in her study of Buddhist nuns, "much research finds that the idea of women having inferior karma has had a negative impact on the welfare of Buddhist nuns." Cheng (65) adds, "socially, the idea of women's inferior karma might hinder nuns to compete in the same activities as monks. This problem seems to be more severe in Taiwan than in Sri Lanka."

[4] The relevant part of the aspiration, translated in Griswold and Prasert (55), reads: "by the power of my merit, may I be reborn as a male in the future . . . may I retain this woman's accumulated merit."

[5] Griswold and Prasert (55 note 90) comment that in the aspiration the expression "'this woman' is of course the donor herself in her present existence . . . she is here speaking as if she had already been reborn as a male and were viewing the present events in retrospect."

[6] Pj II 77,31: *jigucchanīyo mātugāmo, cakkavattidhītā pi paravasaṃ gacchati, tasmā ahaṃ itthibhāvaṃ anupagamma puriso bhaveyyan ti*; cf. also Oikawa (67f).

The story then continues by reporting that she was indeed able to overcome the fruition of the previous evil deed (*pāpakamma*) that had caused her to be born as a woman and with the power of her present meritorious deed and aspiration was eventually reborn as a male *devaputta*.

Change of Sex

As the tale from the *Paramatthajotikā* shows, the notion that being female is related to bad karma is found in the Pāli commentarial tradition. Another example is the commentary on the *Dhammapada*,[7] which reports the tale of a householder by the name of Soreyya. The story goes that, on seeing the beautiful skin colour of the *bhikkhu* Mahākaccāyana, Soreyya had the wish to have him as his wife or else that his wife might have a similar bodily hue. This impure thought caused him to change into a woman right on the spot.[8] The tale continues with his experiences as a woman until at some point he offers a meal to Mahākaccāyana and asks to be forgiven, whereupon he becomes male again.

In this story, a bad deed results in becoming a woman, and a good deed in turn enables becoming a man. In the course of narrating this tale, the *Dhammapada* commentary makes the following statement:

> Men who have transgressed with the wives of others will after death be tormented for many hundreds of thousands

[7] Dhp-a I 325,11 to 332,20; the whole tale has been translated by Burlingame (23–28).

[8] On the motif of change of sex cf., e.g., Appleton ("Continuity" 170f), Appleton ("In the Footsteps" 43–47), Bapat, Brown ("Change"), Doniger (260–302), Faure (100), Finnegan (133–140), Gyatso (110f), Hae-ju, Nattier (*Few* 98), Ohnuma (124–134), Paul (166–199), Perera (161f), Powers (esp. 125f, 134–140, 173f, 185–187), Scherer, Schuster, Shyu (183–188), Talim (68f), Verma (82), Young (*Courtesans* 191–203), and Young ("Female").

> of years in hell; on coming back to human existence they will for 100 rebirths undergo birth as a woman.[9]
>
> Women who have made merit by giving, etc., and who have discarded the wish for birth as a woman with the mental resolve: "May this merit of ours lead to the obtaining of rebirth as a man," will after death obtain rebirth as a man.[10]

This mode of presentation appears to follow a general tendency in ancient Indian literature, where in the words of Brown ("Change" 6) "a change from woman to man is always desirable while the reverse is always undesirable."[11]

The Pāli *Vinaya* reports rulings promulgated by the Buddha when a *bhikkhu* reportedly changed into a female and a *bhikkhuṇī* became a male.[12] Unlike the *Dhammapada* commentary, however, the *Vinaya* does not give a value judgment for these two cases. Instead, both are simply reported as a matter of fact, without a distinction between the case of a male changing to female or vice versa. That is, in the canonical account there is no indication that for the *bhikkhu* to become a female is the

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[9] Dhp-a I 327,4: *purisā hi parassa dāre aticaritvā kālaṃ katvā bahūni vassasatasahassāni niraye pacitvā manussajātiṃ āgacchantā attabhāvasate itthibhāvaṃ āpajjanti.* Here and elsewhere, translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[10] Dhp-a I 327,12: *itthiyo pana dānādīni puññāni katvā itthibhāve chandaṃ virājetvā, 'idaṃ no puññaṃ purisattabhāvapaṭilābhāya saṃvattatū 'ti cittaṃ adhiṭṭhahitvā kālaṃ katvā purisatta-bhāvaṃ paṭilabhanti.*

[11] Doniger (281) explains that "where men are usually cursed to become women, women often choose to be men—a not surprising asymmetry, since the culture regards male status as higher than female."

[12] Vin III 35,12+18.

result of bad karma, or that for a *bhikkhuṇī* to change into a male is the result of good karma.[13]

Only the commentary to this episode gives such a value judgment, indicating that maleness is superior to femaleness. The commentary explains that a loss of maleness is the result of a strong unwholesome deed, and its replacement by femaleness is due to a weak wholesome deed. Conversely, loss of femaleness is the result of a weak unwholesome deed, and its replacement with maleness is due to a strong wholesome deed.[14]

That no such value judgement is found in the canonical *Vinaya* of the Theravāda tradition seems to concord with the case of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* where, according to Finnegan (136), also no

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[13] Scherer (67f) speaks of a "basically non-judgemental reaction of the Buddha," noting, "this initial pragmatical approach towards gender-crossing is later modified in the authoritative commentary . . . to the *vinaya*" where, in the words of Scherer (69), the commentarial stance is evidence for "an underlying assumption on gender inequality."

[14] Sp I 274,18: *imesu tāva dvīsu liṅgesu purisaliṅgaṃ uttamaṃ itthiliṅgaṃ hīnaṃ. tasma purisaliṅgaṃ balavākusalena antaradhāyati, itthiliṅgaṃ dubbalakusalena patiṭṭhāti. itthiliṅgaṃ pana antaradhāyantaṃ dubbalākusalena antaradhāyati purisaliṅgaṃ balavakusalena patiṭṭhati.* A very similar passage is found in the *Atthasālinī*, As 322,25, translated in Pe Maung Tin (412), which Powers (126) renders as stating that "[the marks of] both sexes change—[those of males] disappear on account of many offenses, while with many good actions [a female] becomes a male." This appears to capture only part of the position taken in the commentarial tradition; in fact both works continue by pointing out that in each of the two cases, loss of the previous sex characteristic is due to an unwholesome deed and gain of the later sex characteristic is due to a wholesome deed, *evaṃ ubhayam pi akusalena antaradhāyati, kusalena paṭilabbhati*. That is, a change of sex invariably takes place because of an unwholesome deed, which could be either weak (loss of femaleness) or strong (loss of maleness). This appears to be somewhat more nuanced than Powers's presentation.

such evaluation is found.[15] However, in line with the tendency in the Pāli commentarial tradition, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* reflects a gendered evaluation; it associates the transformation of a *bhikṣu* into a female with an unwholesome deed, notably the unwholesome deed of calling the [male] Saṅgha [members] females.[16]

These instances give the impression that there might have been a shift of attitude from the canonical sources to the position taken in later literature.[17] In the words of Appleton ("In the Footsteps" 47), "the karmic reasons for female birth are primarily a commentarial preoccupation."

Karma and its Fruit

A detailed exposition of karma and its results can be found in the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*. This discourse does not

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[15] Finnegan (136) notes that the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* "does not distinguish in *any* significant way between female-to-male and male-to-female transformations. Were it the case that the *MSV* [Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*] imagined that sex change from male to female was associated with 'extraordinarily negative conduct' whereas female-to-male transformation could only result from acts of great beneficence, then it would be unthinkable that an ordained woman could become a man while breaking every manner of monastic rule . . . but this is precisely what this section of the *MSV* [Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*] envisions, again and again and again. John Powers' [2009: 137] comment of 'Indian Buddhist literature' that 'when men change to women it is commonly portrayed as a tragedy for them and as a result of extraordinarily negative conduct' … is most emphatically not the case in this instance of Indian Buddhist literature."

[16] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.55, Pradhan (232,7): *yathā saṅghastrīvādasamudācārādvyañjana-parivṛttiḥ śrūyate*.

[17] According to Horner (50), "by the time that the Jātakas and their Commentaries were written down . . . the reviving anti-feminism . . . left its mark in sentiments not stressed in the earlier literature."

broach the topic of maleness or femaleness at all.[18] Among the discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga-sutta* stands out for having the highest number of parallel versions (preserved in a range of languages: Chinese, Khotanese, Sanskrit, Sogdian, Tibetan, and Tocharian).[19] This range of versions offers clear testimony to the popular appeal of the discourse's exposition on the effect particular deeds have on one's future life. The *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga-sutta* establishes the following relationships in this respect:

> Killing others—one will become short lived.
>
> Hurting others—one will become sick.
>
> Being angry—one will become ugly.
>
> Being envious—one will become uninfluential.
>
> Being stingy—one will become poor.
>
> Being arrogant—one will be of low birth.
>
> Not asking questions—one will become stupid.

The fact that the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga-sutta* and its parallels do not mention rebirth as a woman in their survey of what deeds lead to what effects in a future life gives the impression that sex was considered only incidental to the question of rebirth at the time when the different versions of this discourse came into existence and reached their present form.[20]

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[18] MN 135 at MN III 202,11 to 206,31.

[19] For a comparative study of MN 135 cf. Anālayo (*Comparative* 767–775).

[20] In Anālayo ("Historical") I argue that the canonical sources, in particular the Pāli discourses, reflect a historical strata distinct from that of the commentaries, contrary to the position taken by Schopen.

In the above scheme of karma and its results, rebirth as a female in ancient Indian society would probably find its place under becoming "uninfluential." That is, one of the possible results of being envious now is that one will be reborn in a situation where one has to suffer discrimination. From this viewpoint, then, it would indeed be bad karma to be reborn as a woman *if* this takes place in a society where women are discriminated against. In other words, the karma of being reborn as a woman does not appear to be singled out as in itself negative. Female birth is only the result of bad karma if one is reborn in a patriarchal society—like ancient India—where women are discriminated against, and thus one finds oneself in an inferior position by dint of one's birth as a female.[21]

In fact the above-mentioned literary motif of sex change within the same life shows that one's sex was not seen as something immutably fixed, but rather as something fluid, depending on conditions and circumstances. Here, too, it is demeritorious to change from male to female when this happens in a society where females find themselves in a disadvantageous position because of their sex.

Birth of a Daughter

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* directly takes up what appears to have been a prevalent attitude in ancient India regarding birth as a

[21] Appleton ("In the Footsteps" 47f) comments, "from the observation that women are socially disadvantaged, the argument is that there must be some karmic cause for female birth." "The assumption that female birth is inferior is supported by the obvious social constraints of women . . . this . . . is explained by the idea that birth as a woman is a form of karmic punishment for immoral acts." Gross (10) sums up that the "traditional teaching that female rebirth is less fortunate than male rebirth is precisely about the pain of being female in a male-dominated system."

female and reports how the Buddha reacted when witnessing an instance of this attitude.

> The Discourse on the Daughter[22]
>
> The introduction on Sāvatthī [should be given here].[23] Then King Pasenadi of Kosala approached the Blessed One. Having approached and paid his respect to the Blessed One, he sat down to one side. Then a certain man approached King Pasenadi of Kosala. Having approached him, he announced close to the ears of King Pasenadi of Kosala: "Your Majesty, Queen Mallikā has given birth to a daughter." When this was said, King Pasenadi of Kosala was displeased.[24]
>
> Having seen that King Pasenadi of Kosala was displeased, on this occasion the Blessed One uttered these stanzas:
>
> "A woman may be
>
> Better than a man,[25] ruler of the people,

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[22] SN 3.16 at SN I 86,1 to 86,15. The E^{e} edition by Feer has as its title merely "Daughter," without mentioning "discourse"; the title in the B^{e} edition is instead "Discourse on Mallikā."

[23] C^{e} just reads *sāvatthiyaṃ*. The standard introduction in the form of *sāvatthiyaṃ* or *sāvatthinidānaṃ* appears to be simply an abbreviation and not a reference to the location where the discourses were collected, pace Rhys Davids (xif) and Woodward (xviif); cf. Anālayo ("On the Five" 6 note 4, 16 note 45, 29 note 88, and 52 note 150).

[24] Spk I 155,10 explains that the king thought that Mallikā, whom he had elevated from a lowly family to a position of great power, would have been greatly honored if she had given birth to a son. Thus the depiction of his disappointment would be a reflection of the ancient Indian attitude towards the birth of a female.

[25] Following the reading *posā* in the E^{e} editions by Feer and Somaratne, against *posa* in B^{e}, C^{e}, and S^{e}; cf. also Bodhi (407 note 239).

She may be wise and virtuous,

A good wife who reveres her mother-in-law.

" A man, born from her,

May be a hero and a king.

The son of such a fortunate woman,[26]

May well govern the kingdom."

The above discourse clearly presents a re-evaluation of the notion, apparently shared by the king, that the birth of a female is unfortunate.[27] The phrasing of the stanzas seems to reflect an attempt to adjust this re-evaluation to the frame of mind of the king. Hence they conclude with the glorious vision—for a king—of an heroic future king who governs the kingdom. This of course does not imply that from an early Buddhist

[26] Following the reading *subhagiyā* in the E^{e} edition by Somaratne, B^{e}, and C^{e}, against *subhariyā* in the E^{e} edition by Feer and S^{e}; cf. also Bodhi (407 note 240).

[27] By the time of the *Manusmṛti*, this notion found expression in one of the reasons for divorcing a woman: she gives birth to females only; cf. 9.81, Bühler (342). A telling contrast can be found in some countries in Southeast Asia, described in Andaya (111f) as follows: "the position of Southeast Asian women in the agricultural economy ... made a daughter a valued resource. In most communities a marriage ceremony or its equivalent was the culmination of a long period of reciprocal exchanges, but frequently this exchange (which European observers often described as 'buying' a wife) favored the bride and her family." Thus "European commentators in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently noted the wealth of men who had fathered several daughters . . . an Englishman stationed in west Sumatra put the case succinctly: 'the more females in a planter's family, the richer he is esteemed.' Although such comments occur more frequently in sources from island Southeast Asia, a Chinese observer in Vietnam also remarked on the delight with which parents greeted the birth of a daughter;" to which Andaya (212) adds that "the Dutch minister Candidus specifically commented on the care and affection Taiwanese showed to daughters, remarking that parents 'love the girls more than the boys.'"

viewpoint women are only good for bearing sons, but is simply a reflection of the narrative context.[28]

Akanuma's standard reference work for identifying parallels does not list any parallel for the "Discourse on the Daughter."[29] Nevertheless, elsewhere in the Chinese *Āgama*s material can be found that also considers female birth in a positive light. In what follows I translate two such passages from the *Ekottarika-āgama*.

Two Tales from the *Ekottarika-āgama*

The *Ekottarika-āgama* in which these two tales are found was translated towards the end of the fourth century of the present era, based on what appears to have been a Prākrit original.[30] Although the two passages from the *Ekottarika-āgama* found below present female rebirth in a positive light, such an attitude is not a consistent trait of the collection, which can also be outspokenly misogynistic.[31]

The two *Ekottarika-āgama* passages to be translated below are parallels to the stories of Bhaddā Kaccānā[32]—apparently an alternative

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[28] In fact the listing of eminent *bhikkhuṇī*s AN 1.14.5 at AN I 25,17 to 25,31 and EĀ 5 at T II 558c21 to 559c4 (cf. also Anālayo ("Outstanding")) record the Buddha eulogizing renunciant women—who by going forth have of course renounced their reproductive function—for their spiritual abilities and accomplishments.

[29] Akanuma (180).

[30] For a brief survey of features of the *Ekottarika-āgama* cf. Anālayo ("Zeng-yi").

[31] An example would be the listing of the five evils of women in EĀ 35.8 at T II 700c11.

[32] Mp I 376,19 to 377,30, translated by Bode (789f); for Yasodharā cf. Ap 28 at Ap 584,12 to 590,30 , studied by Walters ("Apadāna" 182–190).

name for Rāhulamātā and thus for Yasodharā[33]—and Bhaddā Kapilānī[34] found in the *Apadāna* and Pāli commentaries.

These two tales in the *Ekottarika-āgama* are instances of a general tendency in this collection to present as a canonical discourse what in the Theravāda tradition is only found in commentarial literature. One example is the report of the destruction of the Sakyans by the son of Pasenadi, which has a counterpart in the commentary on the *Dhammapada* and on the *Jātaka*.[35] Another example is the spectacular passing away of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, which has its Pāli counterpart in the *Apadāna*;[36] and yet another is the tale of a past life of Gotama Buddha as a princess.[37] This tale has a Pāli counterpart in a text not included among the stories found in the canonical *jātaka* commentary.[38] In sum, the *Ekottarika-āgama* clearly remained open to the inclusion of later stories to a greater degree than the Pāli *Nikāya*s and other Chinese *Āgama*s.[39]

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[33] Mp I 377,16 reports that Bhaddā Kaccānā married the *bodhisatta* and gave birth to Rāhula; cf. also Mhv 2.24, Geiger (12), and the discussion in Malalasekera (741). Mp I 377,24 explains that she was called Bhaddā Kaccānā only after her ordination.

[34] Ap 27 at Ap 578,12 to 584,11, studied by Walters ("Apadāna" 175–182); Thī-a 66,1 to 74,18 (1998 ed.), translated by Pruitt (90–98), cf. also Rhys Davids and Norman (37f) and Murcott (102f); and Mp I 375,12 to 376,18, translated by Bode (786–788).

[35] EĀ 34.2 at T II 692a15, counterpart to Dhp-a I 359,6 or Jā 465 at Jā IV 152,29; cf. also Bareau.

[36] EĀ 52.1 at T II 822a3, parallel to Ap 17.145ff at Ap 540,7, translated in Walters ("Gotamī's"). A study of this part in EĀ 52.1 is at present under preparation

[37] EĀ 43.2, which at T II 758c4 identifies the princess as a former life of the Buddha. A study of this episode in EĀ 43.2 is at present under preparation

[38] Jaini (*Paññāsa-Jātaka* 396,1–402,3); cf. also Gombrich (70), Jaini ("Padīpadānajātaka"), Derris, and Skilling ("Gotama's" 950).

[39] For two cases stories of what appear to be very late additions to the collection cf. Anālayo ("Mahāyāna") and Anālayo ("Two").

Former Lives of Bhaddā Kaccāna

The tale of Bhaddā Kaccāna is part of a longer discourse. This discourse begins with King Pasenadi visiting the Buddha. After being taught the Dharma, Pasenadi invites the Buddha and the monastic community to rely on his support alone for a three-month period, which the Buddha accepts. Pasenadi has a great hall erected, where for three months he makes offerings of robes, food, bedding, and medicine.

At the completion of this period, Pasenadi proclaims his satisfaction with the merit he has achieved in this way.[40] In reply the Buddha cautions him not to remain satisfied with the merit he has acquired and relates a story from one of his past lives by way of illustration. The narration of this *jātaka* concludes with the Buddha encouraging Pasenadi not to rest satisfied with the merits he has acquired, but to make use of them for the purpose of progress towards

[40] As part of Pasenadi's proclamation, EĀ 23.1 at T II 609b13 gives an ascending list of recipients of gifts that proceeds from giving to an animal, to giving to an immoral person, to a moral person, to a person free from sensual desire, to one proceeding to stream-entry, to a stream-enterer, to one proceeding to once-return, to a once-returner, to one proceeding to non-return, to a non-returner, to one proceeding to arahant-ship, to an arahant, to one proceeding to becoming a Paccekabuddha, to a Paccekabuddha, to one proceeding to becoming a Tathāgata, and to the Buddha together with the monastic community. Each subsequent gift is of superior merit, beginning with a hundred-fold fruit for giving to an animal. Except for the idea of giving to one who is proceeding to becoming a Paccekabuddha or proceeding to become a Tathāgata, this listing parallels a similar exposition in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta* and its parallels: MN 142 at MN III 254,27; a Gāndhārī fragment, Strauch (35); two discourse versions preserved in Chinese translation, MĀ 180 at T I 722b15 and T 84 at T I 903c27; a discourse quotation in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā*, D 4094 *ju* 255b2 or Q 5595 *tu* 291a2; a Tocharian fragment, YQ 1.20 1/2 recto 6, Ji (182), and an Uighur fragment, folio 9a2682, Geng and Klimkeit (202). For a comparative study of this exposition in MN 142 and its parallels cf. Anālayo (*Comparative* 815f); on variations in the sequence of listing the eight types of noble ones cf. Anālayo ("Purification" 77f).

liberation.[41] Pasenadi then apologizes for his earlier statement, which the Buddha readily accepts.

At this point the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā Kaccānā gets up from her seat, pays respect to the Buddha, and repeats the injunction given by the Buddha to the king that he should seek to progress towards liberation, which she follows by relating her own past as an additional illustration.[42]

> "I recollect that thirty-one aeons [ago] the Tathāgata Sikhin,[43] an arahant, fully awakened, had appeared in the world. He was accomplished in knowledge and conduct, a well-gone one, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, a charioteer of the path of Dharma,[44] a teacher of *deva*s and human beings, called a Buddha, a Blessed One. He was wandering in the Marīci region.[45]

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[41] EĀ 23.1 at T II 611a10: "Great King, you should not speak like this: 'I have now already accomplished the merit to be made by me.' Great King, you should speak like this: 'Let all my various activities performed by body, speech, and mind be completely for seeking liberation. I will not seek meritorious deeds [merely] for living in *saṃsāra*.'" This injunction appears to be in line with a general attitude reflected in early Buddhist texts to encourage lay followers to proceed beyond merit-making to the cultivation of liberating insight; cf. in more detail Anālayo ("Teachings").

[42] The translated text is EĀ 23.1 at T II 611a25 to 611c1. In order to facilitate comparison with the Pāli parallels, in what follows I employ Pāli terminology, without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Ekottarika-āgama*.

[43] Adopting the variant 有 instead of 飯.

[44] EĀ 23.1 at T II 611a27: 無上士, 道法御; on this expression cf. Minh Chau (326) and Nattier ("Ten" 227).

[45] EĀ 23.1 at T II 611a28: 野馬; which in SĀ 265 at T II 68c18 (translated Anālayo ("On the" 36)) corresponds to *marīci*, "mirage;" cf. also Hirakawa (1179), who gives as equivalents *ghoṭaka-mṛga*; *marīci*, *marīcikā*, and the *Mahāvyutpatti* 4798, Sakaki (320): *ghoṭaka-mṛgaḥ*. The *Mahāvadāna-sūtra*, Waldschmidt (79), associates Śikhin with Aruṇāvatī, as does DN 14 at DN II 7,5, reading Aruṇavatī; which has its counterparts in 光相 in DĀ 1 at T I 3b12,

> "At that time, when the time had come to beg for almsfood, that Buddha put on his robes, took his bowl and entered the town of Marīci. At this time there was a messenger in the town, [661b] called Suddhakālaka.[46] That messenger then saw that the Tathāgata was carrying his bowl and had entered the town to beg for almsfood. Having seen him, he thought: 'The Tathāgata has now entered the town; he must need food.'[47]
>
> "He promptly entered his house and came out with food to give to the Tathāgata, generating this aspiration: 'Endowed with this merit, may I not fall into the three evil destinies. May I in a future life meet a venerable noble one like him. May that venerable noble one teach me the Dharma and may I then attain liberation.'
>
> "Blessed One and King Pasenadi, may you both know this: Was the messenger Suddhakālaka at that time someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The reason is that the messenger Suddhakālaka at that time was me.
>
> "At that time I fed the Tathāgata Sikhin and I made this aspiration: 'May I in a future life meet a venerable noble one like this who will teach me the Dharma and may I then attain liberation.' For thirty-one aeons I did not fall into the three evil destinies. I was born among *deva*s and

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阿嚕嚩帝 in T 2 at T I 150c17, and 阿樓那惙提 in T 3 at T I 159b27; cf. also the survey in Waldschmidt (174). Here and elsewhere, my reconstruction of Indic names is tentative and does not imply certainty about the originals.

[46] EĀ 23.1 at T II 611b1: 純黑; for which Hirakawa (927f) gives the following equivalents: *kṛṣṇa, karma kṛṣṇam, śuddhaka-kālaka, śuddha-kāda, śuddha-kālaka.*

[47] My translation is based on emending 飲食 to read 飯食.

human beings, until at last I have now received this particular body. I met the Blessed One and gained the going forth to train in the path.[48] I have eradicated all the influxes and accomplished arahant-ship.[49]

"As the Blessed One said, so superbly and sublimely, in speaking to King Pasenadi: 'Let all the various activities performed by body, speech, and mind be completely for seeking liberation. Do not consume these meritorious deeds on life in *saṃsāra*.'

"If I see *bhikkhu*s, *bhikkhuṇī*s, male lay followers, and female lay followers, with their hearts delighting in the Tathāgata, the thought arises in me: 'Do not all these distinguished beings still need to have a mind of loving regard and reverence towards the Tathāgata?'

"If I see the four assemblies,[50] I approach them and say: 'Virtuous ones, what things do you require: robes and bowls? Sitting cloths? Needle cases? Bathing vessels? Any

[48] Adopting the variant 世尊 instead of 聖尊.

[49] It is worthy of note that in Ap 28.65ff at Ap 589,15 Yasodharā accompanies a list of her meritorious offerings with the following recurrent injunction (11 times): *mahārāja suṇohi me* (although B^e reads instead *dhammarājā suṇohi me*). The recurrent injunction "Great King listen to me" in a list of accumulated merits (which then leads up to her realization) would fit a setting as described in the present *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse. Lack of awareness of such a setting could then easily have caused a revision of *mahārāja* to become *dhammarājā*, on the assumption that her stanzas are addressed to the Buddha, instead of to a king (like Pasenadi). In fact Walters ("Apadāna" 187) expresses his puzzlement at the expression *mahārāja* in this part of Ap, referring to it as "a speech addressed (to the Buddha? the Buddha's father? someone in the text's audience?) in the vocative 'O Great King' (*mahārāja*)."

[50] Adopting a correction suggested in the CBETA edition of 說 to read 設.

> other sundry requisites of recluses? I will supply them all.' Being permitted to do so, I seek for them by begging anywhere. If I get them, that is a great fortune. If I do not get them, then I will go to Uttarakuru, [Apara]goyāna, and Pubbavideha, seeking an offering.[51] The reason is that through all this the four assemblies will gain the path to Nirvāṇa."
>
> At that time the Blessed One, examining the mind of the *bhikkhuṇī* [Bhaddā] Kaccāna, said to the *bhikkhu*s: "Have you seen such liberation of the mind by faith as in the *bhikkhuṇī* [Bhaddā] Kaccāna?" The *bhikkhu*s replied: "We have not seen it, Blessed One." The Blessed One said: "Among my disciples the *bhikkhuṇī* [Bhaddā] Kaccāna is the *bhikkhuṇī* who is foremost in having attained liberation by faith."[52]
>
> At that time the *bhikkhuṇī* [Bhaddā] Kaccāna, King Pasenadi, and the four assemblies, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and received it respectfully.[53]

In the above discourse, Bhaddā Kaccānā gets up in front of the Buddha and the local king and gives expression to her own view on a matter that

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[51] Jamudīpa, Uttarakuru, Aparagoyāna, and Pubbavideha are the four great continents that in Buddhist cosmology make up a world system, *cakkavāla*.

[52] The same rank is accorded to her in the listing of eminent disciples in EĀ 5.1 at T II 559a5; whereas the listing in AN 1.14.5 at AN I 25,29 reckons her outstanding for having attained great supernormal knowledges, *mahābhiññappattānaṃ*; cf. also the listing of accomplishments of Yasodhara in Ap 28.22f at Ap 586,5. AN 1.14.7 at AN I 26,24 lists the lay woman Kātiyānī as foremost among female lay disciples for her faith.

[53] For a discussion of the expression 奉行, found regularly as part of the standard conclusion of *Āgama* discourses, cf. Anālayo (*Madhyama-āgama* 521–525).

had just been expounded by the Buddha. By relating the story of her former life to illustrate the teaching King Pasenadi had just received, she does exactly the same as what the Buddha had done before her, when he related the story of one of his past lives for the same teaching purpose.

The way this is depicted in the above *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse gives the impression that Bhaddā Kaccānā was not at all apprehensive that expressing her opinion and even going so far as to detail her personal past life could in any way be perceived as inappropriate, perhaps even as a form of disrespect towards the Buddha through speaking in front of him without having been invited to do so. In reply to this, the Buddha is shown to praise her as a disciple foremost among those liberated by faith.

In this way, on a rather official occasion, namely the conclusion of three months of offerings, the Buddha is depicted as being perfectly comfortable when a *bhikkhuṇī* disciple of his simply gets up in front of the Buddha, the local king, and the four assemblies and lectures on her own on a topic the Buddha had already expounded. This seems quite different from the kind of behaviour that is expected from nuns in a modern day Theravāda setting.[54]

The Pāli commentarial tradition reports that in a former birth in the distant past Bhaddā Kaccānā had witnessed how the Buddha Padumuttara proclaimed a *bhikkhuṇī* as his foremost disciple among

[54] In the case of Thailand, for example, Esterik (40) reports of two outstanding female lay meditation teachers that they "lived like the women in white, *mæchi*, although they rejected this role because the generally low status of the *mæchi* would have limited their ability to lead lay groups." On the situation of nuns, *mae chi*, in Thailand cf. also, e.g., Barnes, Brown (*Journey*), Collins and McDaniel, Cook, Falk (*Making*), Falk ("Women"), Kabilsingh, Keyes, Ito ("New"), Ito ("Ordained"), Jordt, Seeger ("Against"), Seeger ("bhikkhunī"), Seeger ("Changing"), Seeger ("Reversal"), Skilling ("Female"), and Tomalin.

those endowed with great supernormal knowledges. Thereupon Bhaddā Kaccānā aspired to achieve the same honour in the future,[55] which implies that she wished to be reborn as a female. Although such an active wish is not reported in the above *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse, an aspiration of this type can be repeatedly found in the *Ekottarika-āgama* account of the past lives of *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā Kapilānī, translated below.[56]

Former Lives of Bhaddā Kapilānī

> I heard it like this. At one time the Buddha was at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park, together with a great community of *bhikkhu*s, 500 men.
>
> At that time in Sāvatthī there was a *bhikkhuṇī* called Bhaddā, who was dwelling together with 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s, of whom she was the leader. Then, being in a secluded place, the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā was reflecting by herself. Seated with crossed legs and with mindfulness fixed in front of her, she was recollecting events from her innumerable previous lives, whereupon she smiled.
>
> A *bhikkhuṇī* saw from afar that the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā was smiling. Having seen this, she approached the [other] *bhikkhuṇī*s [and said]: "The *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā is now alone beneath a tree and she is smiling. What will be the reason?"
>
> Then the 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s together approached the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā and paid respect with their heads at her feet. At

[55] Mp I 377,12.

[56] The translated text is EĀ 52.2 at T II 823b18 to 825b15.

that time the 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s said to Bhaddā: "What causes you to smile, as you sit alone beneath a tree?"

At that time the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā said to the 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s: "Just now beneath this tree I was recollecting events from my innumerable previous lives, seeing again my life experiences of former times, [823c] dying here and being reborn there—I was contemplating it all." Then the 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s said further: "We wish that you would tell us of those former events."

Then the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā said to the 500 *bhikkhuṇī*s: "In the distant past, ninety-one aeons ago, a Buddha called Tathāgata Vipassin appeared in the world. He was an arahant, fully awakened, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, a well-gone one, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, a charioteer of the path of Dharma, a teacher of *deva*s and human beings, called a Buddha, a Blessed One, who had manifested in the world.

"At that time the region called Bandhuma[tī] was flourishing with a population beyond counting. At that time the Tathāgata was wandering in that country, leading a community of 168,000 *bhikkhu*s. Surrounded by them on all sides he was teaching them the Dharma. The Buddha's name was then renowned in the four directions thus: 'The Buddha Vipassin possesses all the marks [of a Buddha]; he is a good field of merit for everyone.'

"At that time in that region there was a youth called Brahmadeva, who was of beautiful appearance, rarely found in the world. Then that youth was walking in the streets and alleys holding a bejewelled parasol in his hand.

A female householder who was beautiful as well was then also walking along that road. All the people were looking at her.

"Then the youth thought: 'Now I too am beautiful, and I am holding a bejewelled parasol in my hand. [Yet] none of the people look at me. All of these people together are looking at this woman. I should now devise a means to make people look at me.'

"Then that youth went out of that town and approached the Buddha Vipassin. Holding the bejewelled parasol [over the Buddha] with his hands,[57] he worshipped him for seven days and seven nights, and made this aspiration: 'If the Buddha Vipassin has such supernatural power, such supernatural strength, and is a supreme field of merit in the world and in the heavens, then may I, endowed with this merit, in a future life have a female body, such that on seeing it there will be no one who will not be thrilled with joy.'

"At that time, having worshipped that Buddha for seven days and seven nights, the youth lived out his lifespan and was after that reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three with a female body of utmost beauty, foremost among *devī*s, surpassing other *devī*s in the five types of excellence. What are the five? That is, they are divine lifespan, divine complexion, divine happiness, divine might, and divine dominion.

[57] My translation is based on emending 寶華 to read 寶蓋, in line with the reading found in the remainder of the discourse.

"Then, having seen her, the *deva*s of the Thirty-three said to one another: 'This *devī* is superb, no one is her equal.' Some *deva*s among them said: 'This *devī* and I should become husband and wife,'[58] and competing with one another they quarrelled. Then the great king of the *deva*s said: 'Do not quarrel with each other. Whoever among you is able to proclaim the most excellent poem can take this *devī* for his wife.'[59] [824a]

"At that time, one *deva* spoke this poem:

'Whether I get up or whether I sit down again,

Being awake or falling asleep, there is no joy for me.

When I am asleep for a while,

Only right after that am I without desire [for you].'

"At that time, another *deva* spoke this poem:

'You are right now the cause of my delight.

Being asleep [he] does not miss you,

[But] I am now aroused by lustful thoughts,

Like the beating of a battle drum.'

"At that time, another *deva* spoke this poem:

'Even if the battle drum is being beaten,[60]

[58] Adopting the variant 夫婦 instead of 天后.

[59] Adopting the variant 偈 instead of 法.

[60] Adopting the variant 有 instead of 復.

Yet there comes a time when it becomes still.

[But] my desire [for you] is a quickly spreading disease,

Like flowing water that never stops.'

"At that time, another *deva* spoke this poem:

'Even water that carries away great logs,

Does in time become still.

[But] I constantly think [of you] with desire,

Unblinking, like a slain elephant.'

"At that time, the most respected *deva* among all the *deva*s spoke this poem:

'You [*deva*s] are still at ease,

Each of you is able to speak a poem.

Now I do not know for myself,

Am I alive or am I dead?'

"At that time all *deva*s said to that *deva*: 'Well done, *deva*. The poem you have spoken is the most clear and excellent. Today the king of *deva*s should be given this *devī*.' At that time, the *devī* entered the palace of the king of *deva*s.

"Sisters, you should not have any doubt about this, the reason being [that you think]: The youth who at that time worshipped the Buddha by [holding] a bejewelled parasol above him, was he someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The youth at that time was me.

"In the past, thirty-one aeons ago, the Tathāgata Sikhin appeared in the world. He was wandering in the Marīci region, being accompanied by a great *bhikkhu* community, 160,000 men. At that time that *devī*, after her lifespan had come to its end, was reborn among human beings, taking a female body of utmost beauty, rarely found in the world.

"Then the Tathāgata Sikhin, when the time had come to beg for almsfood, put on his robes, took his bowl and entered the town of Marīci. Then that *devī* had in turn become the wife of a householder. She offered excellent food and drink to the Tathāgata Sikhin, and she also made this aspiration:[61] 'Endowed with the merit of this deed, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into the three evil destinies, and may I be of such beautiful appearance as is unusual among human beings.'

"At that time that woman, after her lifespan had come to its end, was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. [824b] Again she had a female body of the utmost beauty, possessing the five types of excellence and surpassing all the other *deva*s. Was the *devī* at that time someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The reason is: that woman was me.

"In that aeon the Tathāgata Vessabhū appeared in the world. At that time the *devī*, having lived out her lifespan, had after death come to be reborn among human beings, taking a female body of beautiful appearance, rarely found in the world. Again she had become the wife of a

[61] Adopting the variant 亦 instead of 普.

householder. At that time the householder's wife also made this aspiration, offering excellent robes to the Tathāgata:[62] 'May I have a female body in a future life.'

"Then after death that woman was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, with a beautiful appearance surpassing that of the other *devī*s. Was that *devī* at that time someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The reason is: the woman at that time was me.

"Then that woman lived out her lifespan and after death came to be reborn among human beings in the great town of Vārāṇasī. She was a female servant of the wife of the householder Candābha and her appearance was ugly, displeasing to the sight of people. Since Vessabhū had departed from the world, no Buddha had appeared.[63] [But] a Paccekabuddha was wandering around at that time.[64]

"Then the wife of the householder Candābha said to her female servant: 'Go around outside and look for a recluse who is of such beautiful appearance that he will inspire my confidence.[65] Lead him to the house. I wish to worship him.'

"At that time that female servant went out of the house and looked outside for a recluse. She came across the

[62] My translation is based on a sequential emendation of 妙衣好服 to read 妙好衣服.

[63] Adopting a variant that adds 出.

[64] Here and below adopting the variant 辟支 instead of 各.

[65] EĀ 52.2 at T II 824b17: 入吾意者, conveying the sense that his beautiful appearance should be such that it literally "enters my mind," where my somewhat free rendering follows the indication by Hirakawa (157) that 入 can render *adhi-√muc*.

> Paccekabuddha, who was wandering in the town begging [almsfood]. However, he was of ugly and repulsive appearance. Then that female servant said to the Paccekabuddha: 'The lady of the house wishes to meet you. Please come to the house.' She then entered and said to her mistress: 'A recluse has come. You can come and meet him.'
>
> "When the householder's wife saw the recluse, her mind was displeased. She said to her female servant: 'Send him away again. I will not give to him. The reason is because of his ugly appearance.'
>
> "At that time her female servant said to the housewife: 'If the housewife does not make an offering to the recluse, then I will now take my food allowance for today and use it all to make an offering to him.' Then that housewife brought out her food allowance, one measure of finely broken rice.[66] Then that female servant took it and offered it to the recluse.[67] When the Paccekabuddha had received

[66] Adopting the variant 斗 instead of 升.

[67] Adopting the variant 使 instead of 便. Ap 27.37 at Ap 581,13, Thi-a 66,9, and Mp I 375,20 also report a former life by Bhaddā at Vārāṇasī during a time when no Buddha had arisen, when she also made an offering to a Paccekabuddha. But the details of the story differ. She was not a servant, but a housewife herself, and she filled the bowl of the Paccekabuddha with mud. She then repented her deed, cleaned his bowl, and filled it with "ghee," *ghata*, according to Ap 27.41 at Ap 582,2, or else with the "four sweets," *catumadhura*, according to Thi-a 66,16 and Mp I 376,3 (in modern day Sri Lankan usage *catumadhu* refers to a mixture of ghee, oil, molasses and honey; cf. also Kawanami (97 note 21). An offering of *catumadhu* is highly appreciated in monastic circles, because this mixture is a form of 'medicine' that monastics can consume even after noon, cf. Vin I 200,19, and keep for up to seven days once it has been offered, cf. Vin III 251,14).

this food, he flew up into the air and performed the eighteen transformations.[68]

"Then the householder's female servant made the aspiration again: 'Endowed with this merit, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into the three evil destinies and may I in a future life have a female body of the utmost beauty.' [824c]

"Then that Paccekabuddha, holding in his hand the bowl with the food in it, flew around the town three times. The householder Candābha was leading a gathering of 500 merchants in the community hall. Then the townspeople, men and women, adults and children, saw the Paccekabuddha holding in his hand the bowl with the food and flying through the air. On seeing this, they said to one another: 'Whose merit it this? Who has met this Paccekabuddha and offered him food?'[69]

"Then the householder's female servant said to the housewife: 'Please come outside to look at the power of the recluse.[70] He is flying through the air and performing the eighteen transformations. His powers are immeasurable.'

"Then the householder's wife said to her female servant: 'If you give to me all the merit you gained from offering food to the recluse today, I shall give you two days's food

[68] The eighteen transformations are a series of supernormal performances; for listings cf., e.g., T 1579 at T XXX 491c6 or T 1912 at T XLVI 442a29.

[69] Adopting a variant that adds 誰.

[70] Adopting a variant that adds 願 and the variant 看 instead of 向.

right away.' Her female servant replied: 'I cannot agree to transfer the merit.'[71]

"The housewife said: 'I will give you four days's food right away . . . *up to* . . . ten days's food right away.' Her female servant replied: 'I cannot agree to transfer the merit.'

"The housewife said: 'I will now give you 100 gold coins.' Her female servant replied: 'I do not need that either.'[72] The housewife said further: 'I will now give you 200 . . . *up to* . . . 1000 gold coins.' Her female servant replied: 'I do not need that either.'

"The housewife said: 'I will set you free; you will no longer be a servant.' Her female servant replied:[73] 'I do not seek to be an independent person either.' The housewife said further: 'You will become the housewife and I will become the servant.'[74] Her female servant replied: 'I do not seek to become the housewife either.'

"The housewife said: 'I will now take hold of you and beat you, mutilate you by cutting off your ears and nose, cutting off your hands and feet; I will cut off your head.' Her female servant replied: 'All such pain I can bear, but I will not transfer the merit from the offering. My body is subject to the lady of the house; the goodness of my mind is quite a different matter.' At that time, the householder's wife beat her female servant.

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[71] Adopting a variant that adds 我.

[72] Adopting a variant that adds 亦.

[73] Adopting a variant that adds 其.

[74] Adopting the variant 為 instead of 作.

"Then each of the 500 merchants was saying: 'This saintly person had come today to beg for food. He will certainly have been given an offering at my home.' Then the householder Candābha dismissed all of the people, returned to his house and went inside. He saw that his wife had taken hold of the female servant and was beating her. He asked: 'Why is this female servant being beaten?' Then the female servant informed him fully of the events. Then the householder Candābha was delighted and thrilled [that the Paccekabuddha had been given food at his house], unable to contain himself. He made the housewife a female servant and placed the female servant in the position of housewife.

"At that time the king who ruled the town of Vārāṇasī was called Brahmadatta.[75] Then the great king heard that the Paccekabuddha had been given food [at the house] of the householder Candābha. He was extremely pleased that an arahant had been received and a timely offering had been made to him.

"King Brahmadatta dispatched a man to summon the householder Candābha. He said to him: [825a] 'Is it true that food was given to the saintly arahant at your [house]?' The householder replied to the king: 'It is true that the arahant was received and food was offered to him.' Then, having investigated it, King Brahmadatta gave him a reward and also promoted him to a higher position.

[75] The story of Bhaddā's past life experiences in Ap 27.53 at Ap 583,1 also mentions a king by the name of Brahmadatta, who here is a former birth of Mahākassapa.

"Then the [former] female servant of the householder lived out her lifespan and after death was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. She was of beautiful appearance, rarely found in the world, and she surpassed all the other *deva*s in the five types of excellence. Sisters, [was the female servant at that time someone else?]. It should not be seen in this way. The householder's female servant at that time was me.

"In this auspicious aeon a Buddha appeared in the world called the Tathāgata Kakusanda. Then that *devī* lived out her lifespan and after death was reborn among human beings. At that time she became the wife of the Brahmin Yajñadatta. Then this woman fed the Tathāgata and again made an aspiration, wishing to have a female body [in a future life]. After death she was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. She was of beautiful appearance, supreme among all *devī*s. After dying there she was reborn among human beings again.

"At that time the Buddha Konāgamana had appeared in the world. Then that *devī* became a householder woman. She worshipped the Buddha Konāgamana with golden flowers and again [made the aspiration]: 'Endowed with this merit, wherever I am reborn, may I not fall into the three evil destinies, and may the body I take hereafter be a female body.'

"Then this woman lived out her lifespan and after death was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. She was very beautiful, supreme among the assembly of *devī*s, and she possessed the five types of excellence such that [the other *deva*s] could not match her. Was the householder

woman who at that time worshipped the Buddha Konāgamana someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The householder woman at that time was me.

"Then that *devī* lived out her lifespan and came to be reborn among human beings. Being the wife of a householder, she was again of very special appearance, rarely found in the world.[76] At that time the Tathāgata Kassapa had appeared in the world. Then the householder's wife worshipped the Buddha Kassapa for seven days and seven nights and made the aspiration: 'May I obtain a female body in the future.'

"Then the householder's wife lived out her lifespan and after death was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three. She possessed the five types of excellence, excelling other *devī*s. Was the householder's wife who at that time worshipped the Buddha Kassapa someone else? It should not be seen in this way. The householder's wife at that time was me.

"In this auspicious aeon the Buddha Sakyamuni appeared in the world.[77] Then that *devī* was reborn after death in the town of Rājagaha. She became the wife of the Brahmin Kapila.[78] She was of beautiful appearance, excelling the appearance of all [other] women. The Brahmin Kapila's

[76] Adopting the variant 之 instead of 間. According to Thī-a 66,20, at the time of the Buddha Kassapa Bhaddā had been reborn as the daughter of a very wealthy merchant at Vārāṇasī.

[77] Adopting a variant that adds 佛.

[78] In Ap 27.57 at Ap 583,10 Kapila is the name of Bhaddā's father.

wife resembled a polished golden image,[79] as a result of which other women were as if blackened by ink. [825b] Her mind had no desire for the five sensual pleasures.[80]

"Was this wife someone else? Sisters, it should not be seen in this way. The Brahmin's wife at that time was me. Sisters, you should know, because of the merits of former events I became the wife of Pippali Māṇava, that is, of Mahākassapa. The venerable Mahākassapa first went forth himself, and at a later day I too went forth.[81]

"I was recollecting my lives in former days with a female body; for this reason I smiled to myself just now. I had been covered [in ignorance] by not knowing that I worshipped six Tathāgatas, seeking to get a female body. This is the reason I smiled, because of my experiences in former days."

At that time many *bhikkhu*s, who had heard that the *bhikkhuṇī* Bhaddā had recollected events from her own innumerable previous lives, approached the Blessed One.[82]

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[79] Adopting a variant that adds 羅, and the variant 似 instead of 以. Ap 27.58 at Ap 583,11 reports that an actual image of her was made out of gold. According to Th-a III 130,13, the making of this golden image was originally a stratagem by Kassapa to avoid having to marry, as he had told his mother that he would only marry a woman that was equal in beauty to the image. The woman who turned out to fulfil this condition was Bhaddā.

[80] In Ap 27.58 at Ap 583,12 it is Mahākassapa who is qualified as shunning sensual pleasures.

[81] According to Th-a III 132,33, they went forth at the same time, cutting off each other's hair. Having gone forth together, they then separated in order to avoid that others seeing them still together might form a wrong impression of their motivation.

[82] Adopting a variant without 時.

> They paid respect with their heads at his feet, sat down to one side, and told the Tathāgata all that had happened.
>
> At that time the Blessed One said to the *bhikkhu*s: "Have you seen any [other] *bhikkhuṇī* among my disciples who recollects events from innumerable lives like her?" The *bhikkhu*s said to the Buddha: "We have not, Blessed One."
>
> The Buddha said to the *bhikkhu*s: "Among my disciples, the foremost disciple in recollecting events from innumerable lives is the *bhikkhuṇī* Kapilā[nī]."[83]
>
> At that time the *bhikkhu*s, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

Although the *Apadāna* does not mention any aspiration by Bhaddā Kapilānī to be born as a woman at all, the commentary on the *Therīgāthā* indicates that at the time of Padumuttara Buddha she had witnessed a *bhikkhuṇī* being declared foremost in remembering her former lives, whereupon she aspired to the same rank in the future. Similar to the case of Bhaddā Kaccānā, this aspiration implies that Bhaddā Kapilānī wished to be reborn as a female.

According to the above *Ekottarika-āgama* account, Bhaddā Kapilānī repeatedly made an aspiration to be reborn as a female, until eventually she became an arahant *bhikkhuṇī*. The recurrent emphasis on her attractiveness and on her getting married reflects the ancient Indian

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[83] The same rank is accorded to her in the listing of eminent disciples in AN 1.14.5 at AN I 25,27 and EĀ 5.2 at T II 559a10. Thī 65 explicitly mentions her attainment of the three higher knowledges and thus implicitly of her ability to recollect her past lives. According to Thī-a 66,7 and Mp I 376,18, she had formed the aspiration to become foremost among *bhikkhuṇī*s recollecting their past lives in the distant past when witnessing a *bhikkhuṇī* being accorded this position by the Buddha Padumuttara.

narrative setting, where for a woman not to be attractive and not to be wanted in marriage was seen as a serious misfortune.

Notably, in the first instance of these repeated aspirations, a "he" makes the aspiration to become a female, based on a meritorious gift.[84] Although the motivation for this aspiration is not particularly profound—after all he mainly wants to get the attention of others—, the important point is that this discourse gives no impression whatsoever that female rebirth was considered in a negative light. The description of Bhaddā Kapilānī's heavenly rebirths endowed with five qualities is in fact similar to the description of the condition of the future Buddha when being reborn in Tusita.[85] Clearly, she is shown to be comparably endowed with merits and freely chooses to become a woman again and again.

Conclusion

The above translated tales make it clear that in the Buddhist traditions responsible for the arising and transmission of these stories, female birth was not seen as something negative.[86] Although there is evidence for a more negative attitude towards women emerging in commentarial literature, the two specimens translated above from the *Ekottarika-āgama*

[84] Such combining of a meritorious deed with an aspiration is a recurrent pattern in *avadāna* literature in general; cf. also Clark (31f).

[85] MĀ 32 at T I 470a2. Although the same is not reported explicitly in the parallel MN 123, a comparable presentation can be found in DN 30 at DN III 146,3.

[86] Appleton (*Jātaka* 96) notes that in narrative Buddhist literature "many women made offerings to past *buddha*s and resolved to become prominent nuns or laywomen (*not* monks or laymen) in the retinue of Gotama Buddha. It is clearly demonstrated that both men and women are able to attain arahatship, and so there is no need to aspire to a change in gender."

express a rather different attitude. The perspective afforded in these texts appears to be rather that female birth is a valuable asset, as it affords an opportunity for Bhaddā Kaccānā and Bhaddā Kapilānī to walk the path to liberation.

Abbreviations

AN *Aṅguttara-nikāya*

Ap *Apadāna*

As *Atthasālinī*

B[e] Burmese edition

C[e] Ceylonese edition

D Derge edition

DĀ *Dirgha-āgama* (T 1)

Dhp-a *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*

DN *Dīgha-nikāya*

EĀ *Ekottarika-āgama* (T 125)

E[e] PTS edition

Jā *Jātaka*

MĀ *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26)

Mhv *Mahāvaṃsa*

MN *Majjhima-nikāya*

Mp *Manorathapūraṇī*

Pj II *Paramatthajotikā*

Q Peking edition

S[e] Siamese edition

SĀ *Saṃyukta-āgama* (T 99)

SN *Saṃyutta-nikāya*

Sp *Samantapāsādikā*

Spk *Sāratthappakāsinī*

T Taishō edition

Th-a *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā*

Thī *Therīgāthā*

Thī-a *Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā*

Vin *Vinayapiṭaka*

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